

REMARKS

The present Amendment is in response to the Office Action of April 28, 2004. By this Amendment, minor amendments have been made to the claims in order to better distinguish the prior art and to place the claims in allowable condition. Accordingly, consideration and entry of this Amendment is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, the Examiner has allowed claims 1-7, 21, 23, 26, 28, 30 and 32, which action is much appreciated. Claim 1 and its dependent claims main rejected, with the Examiner continuing to rely on the Pronk reference.

Applicants have amended claim 1 in order to incorporate the substance of dependent claim 11, which has correspondingly been cancelled. Claim 1 as amended specifies that the forced cooling operation starts when the steel strip is already in the ferritic range of the steel. It is respectfully submitted that the timing of the cooling step and the rate of cooling are neither disclosed nor suggested in Pronk. Further, these features result in particular advantages in the resulting steel strip, as more fully explained below.

Specifically, as disclosed in the application in the portion bridging pages 8 and 9, the cooling rate claimed in claim 1 prevents excessive growth in the grain size while at the same time promoting uniform cooling. Pronk does not disclose or suggest either this feature, or its advantage. Moreover, starting the forced cooling when the strip is already in the ferritic range contributes to a high level of uniformity in the characteristics of the final product. Pronk does not disclose that the forced cooling starts when the strip is already ferritic, nor does he disclose or suggest the above noted advantage as described in the portion of the specification bridging pages 9 and 10. Attendantly, it is noted that, in contrast to the prevailing art, the forced cooling step according to the invention is not intended to convert the steel to the ferritic structure; rather, the ferritic structure is already present in the steel prior to the forced cooling step.

In view of the foregoing, it is believed to have been established that the prior art relied upon by the Examiner is deficient with regard to the noted teachings. Accordingly, with the present amendments, it is believed that all claims now stand in condition for allowance.

Inasmuch as the only substantive amendment presented herein simply incorporates the substance of a dependent claim into its parent independent claim, no new issues are raised, and accordingly entry of this Amendment is both warranted and necessary.

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Richard C. Turner', written over a horizontal line.

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